

10. OCCURRENCE OF THE INDIAN SKIMMER OR
SCISSORBILL (*RYNCHOPS ALBICOLLIS*
SWAINSON) IN SALSETTE ISLAND

At just on sunrise on 29th August 1970, I was watching egrets and herons on an open expanse of water of the Chedda Salt Pans along the Bombay Eastern Expressway when I saw two Skimmers (*Rynchops albicollis* Swainson) flying low and ploughing their lower mandibles through the placid water. I watched these birds for over ten minutes before they departed over the Expressway in the direction of Trombay. I again watched two Skimmers on the evening of 30th August over the same stretch of water and next morning, just at day-break and for about twenty minutes thereafter, there were three Skimmers there.

On the evening of 31st August I was accompanied by Mr. Humayun Abdulali and we watched two Skimmers in precisely the same area keeping together and working up and down, quite close to the road. On the evening of 6th September I noted three Skimmers at the same place.

IND. HANDBOOK Vol. 3 indicates that this bird is usually found on large rivers but has also been recorded on 'estuaries and inshore coastal waters (Bombay once)'. I understand that 'Bombay' in this instance refers to Alibag, Kolaba District, where one was obtained in March 1890. From Mr. Abdulali I learn that on 16th November 1940 he observed several flocks ranging from 10/50 birds fighting up Dharamtar Creek, Kolaba District, across the harbour, in the manner of gulls, and on the following day saw several flocks working up one of the smaller creeks. He was also informed by Mr. A. R. Haseler, then a member of the Society and a keen fisherman, that he had seen some in Dharamtar Creek in November 1950.

My records appear to be the first from Salsette Island and the few observations confirmed that the birds are most active, at least visible in this particular place, at dawn and dusk.

CARE MERCANTILE BANK LTD.,

52/60 M. G. ROAD,

BOMBAY-1,

September 8, 1970.

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11. THE BLACKBIRD *TURDUS MERULA MAXIMUS*
IN NEPAL

While searching the literature on Himalayan birds, it came as a surprise to me to find out that the Blackbird *Turdus merula maximus* had never been recorded in Nepal. Its nearest occurrence to this country is Chini in the Sulej Valley (Waite, H. W., 1962, *JBNHS*

59:962) and Garhwal (Whymper, S. L. 1911, *ibid*, 20:1158), thus leaving a gap of about 1000 km. between the latter locality and Sikkim whence reported by Meinertzhagen (*Ibis* 1927:578). The species has also been recorded at Karta (Tibet), 40 km. east of Mt. Everest (Kinnear, N.B., *Ibis* 1922:507 and Hingston, R.W. 1927, JBNHS 32:322). As early as 1911 Whymper (*loc. cit.*) remarked: 'It is curious that the existence of this bird should have been overlooked in these parts, as it is fairly common and much in evidence, both from its frequenting the open and from its rattling alarm call.'

In central Nepal I observed this unmistakable species on two occasions in 1964: on 14 June at the headwaters of the Tadi Khola River at c. 4200 m. before reaching the Gosainkund Pass, and on 16 June near one of the Gosainkund lakes at c. 4300 m. in boulder-strewn alpine meadows. In both instances the birds (two males) were feeding on mud and sand by a stream. They were quite shy, the flight distance being some 40 or 50 metres, and disappeared by flying low and fast over the ground and plunging behind a cliff. The species was mentioned incidentally by me in the *Ibis* 1965:400. The scarcity of the Blackbird in the central Himalayas seems to be attributable to its preference for a drier biotope; it is common both in Kashmir and in south western Tibet.

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12. BIRDS AND MAMMALS EATING THE FRUITS OF YELLOW OLEANDER (*THEVETIA PERUVIANA*)

Previous records of birds and mammals eating the fruits of Yellow Oleander (*Thevetia peruviana*), published in this *Journal* are, Koel (50:943-944), Grey Hornbill (51:738), Common Myna (52:207), Brahminy Myna, Redwhiskered Bulbul (60:457), Bat (58:808) and Rat (59:947).

In this paper we record that goats and domestic fowls also eat the fleshy mesocarp of the unripe and the ripe fruits of Yellow Oleander (*Thevetia peruviana*) fallen on the ground. More than half a dozen goats daily feed on the leaves and the fruits of the Yellow Oleander in the compound of our house without showing any ill effect. The goats usually spit the seeds, but occasionally a few seeds are swallowed but these seeds are spat out during regurgitation (It is an effective